# Dek Unu Magazine

January 2025

## Time/Motion Study Multiples

## Amy Heller

Cover: Feet First Multiple ©Amy Heller

# Eleven

This is *Dek Unu Magazine*. In Esperanto, dek unu means "eleven." Eleven images from a single artist. Eleven artists in eleven solo issues in each publication year. Dek Unu publishes the work of a new artist-photographer in each issue. The artist's work and words are featured in individual focus as the sole purpose for each issue of the magazine. Unlike other arts and letters magazines which might look for work from a variety of artists to support an editorial staff's theme, at Dek Unu, theme and imagery are always each artist's own.

## This Month

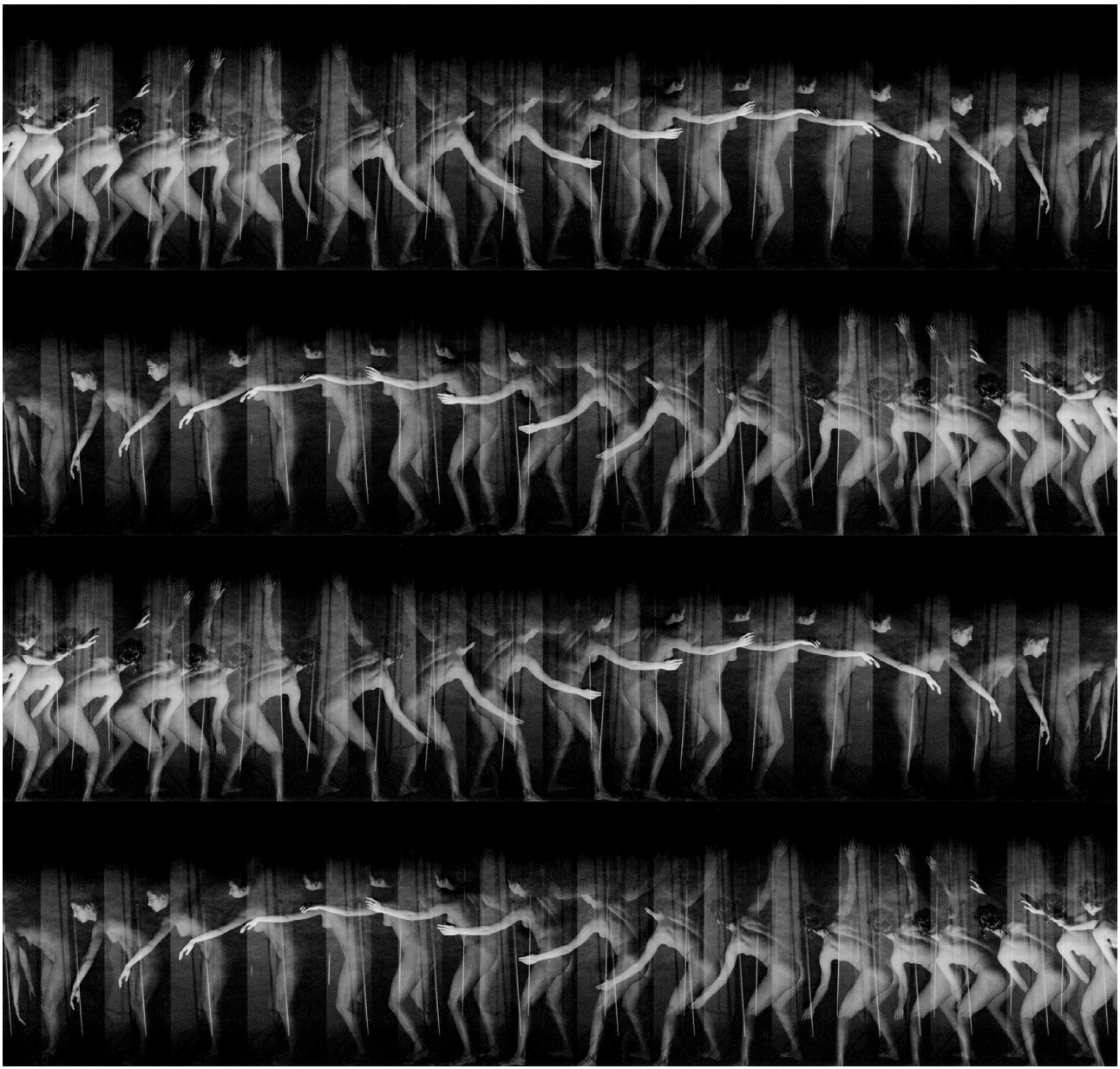
Photography has always been about time. Even the most unremarkable family snapshots are all about preserving moments, and, as relics, the faces and places become more interesting as they age. Photography has also been about motion. Cartier-Bresson's iconic "decisive moment" image shows that Parisian guy, leaping, but frozen in mid-air, above his shadow reflected in the famous Paris mud puddle. Time? Motion? Artist Amy Heller's extraordinary black-and-white photography is about both.

Inspired by a vintage image from 19th century experimenter Étienne-Jules Marey, and equipped with a foot-pedal controlled strobe, Heller started her own quest to create images that, in their liminal, surreal, and surprising complexity, let us see the unseen. Her experiments turned into an M.F.A. degree, a thesis on the history and impacts of human locomotion photography, and her own extraordinary portfolio: *Time/Motion Study Multiples*.

Her *Multiples* start with her archive of time sequence panoramics (all analog) that connect with the ideas of the Cubist and Futurist painters, with photo pioneers Marey and Muybridge, and with more recent sequenced image innovators such as Gjon Mili, Barbara Blondeau, and Andrew Davidhazy. Using her earlier work as fuel, she begins to "play," creating digital collages that combine, overlap, and layer the past to create new works of art in a rectangular format. As skilled a practitioner as she is, and as complex and technically demanding as this kind of photography can be, Amy Heller eschews mathematical precision in favor of "happy accidents." For her, the process is the point and every image is an adventure.

I was in a photo history class in graduate school at The George Washington University and a human locomotion study photograph by Étienne-Jules Marey was on a slide that came up on the overhead screen and that was it for me. I was so excited by the image and I ran to my studio and started experimenting with the moving film stroboscopy method of photographing motion. I researched other photographers/artists from the 19th and 20th century, too: Eadweard Muybridge, Ottomar Anschutz, Thomas Eakins, Gjon Mili, Harold Edgerton, Barbara Blondeau, Andrew Davidhazy, Ralph Eugene Meatyard, Duane Michals (one of my favorite photographers. "The Spirit Leaves the Body" was a seminal photograph for me), and many more.

**Ode to Muybridge Multiple**
*I was once called "Daughter of Muybridge…minus the crazy stuff."*



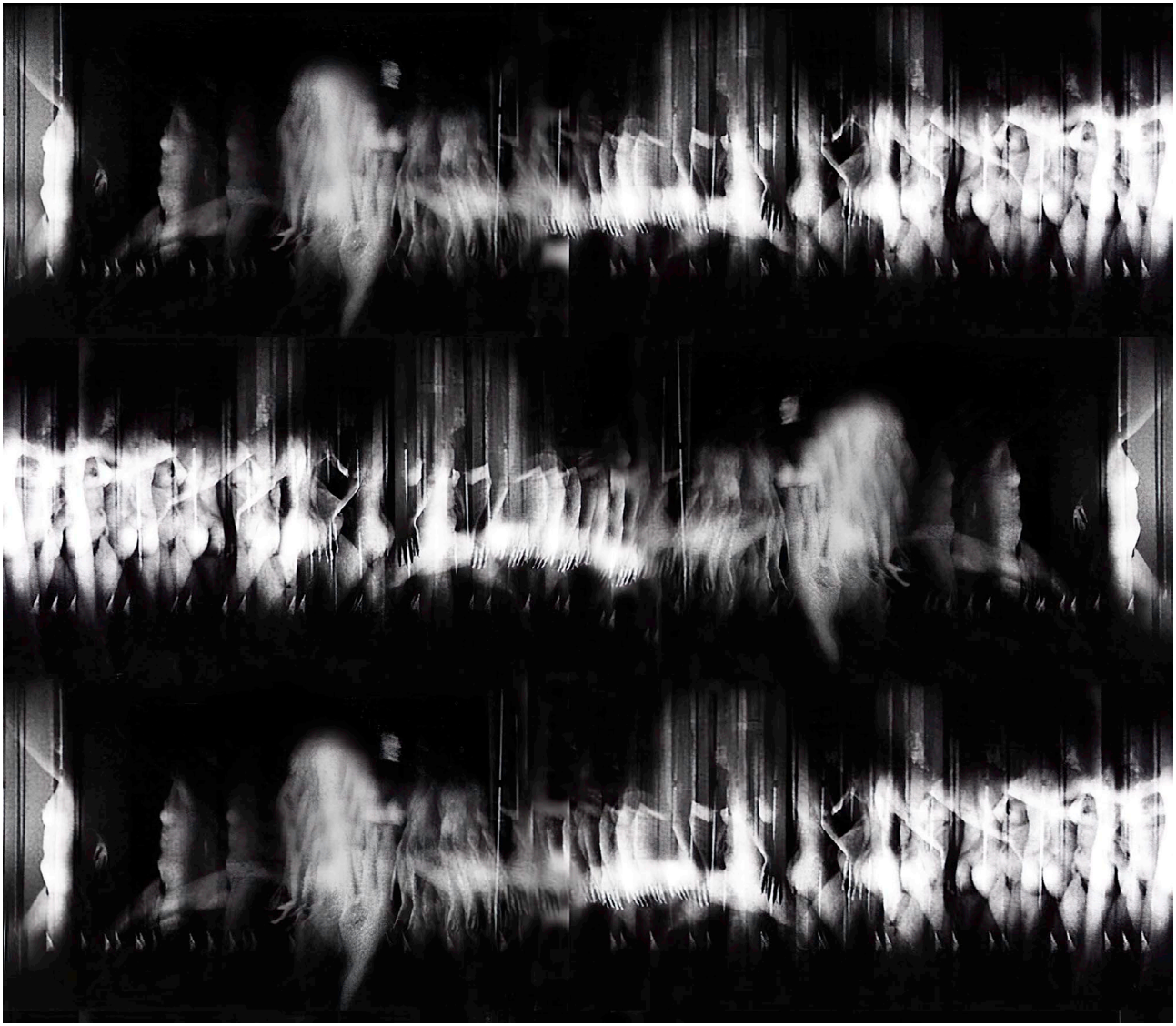
I have always loved dance and movement and as a child I was constantly in motion, dancing to the Beatles or pretending to be a ballerina. Even when seemingly at rest I "moved." I would lie on the living room couch, staring up at the cathedral ceiling, dreaming of the world upside-down. While I was in graduate school, I was a photo editor at U.S. News & World Report and some of the staff photographers gave me a powerful stroboscope with a foot pedal and I was off to the races. My thesis was on the history of human locomotion photography and how it affected art, science, and ways of thinking about motion. As an adult, I still have a fascination with motion and time – I am a child at heart, evidenced by my large collection of wind-up toys.

**Arms Up Multiple**

*Most people see a spine or vertebrae. I see the triumphant moment of "breaking through the door."*

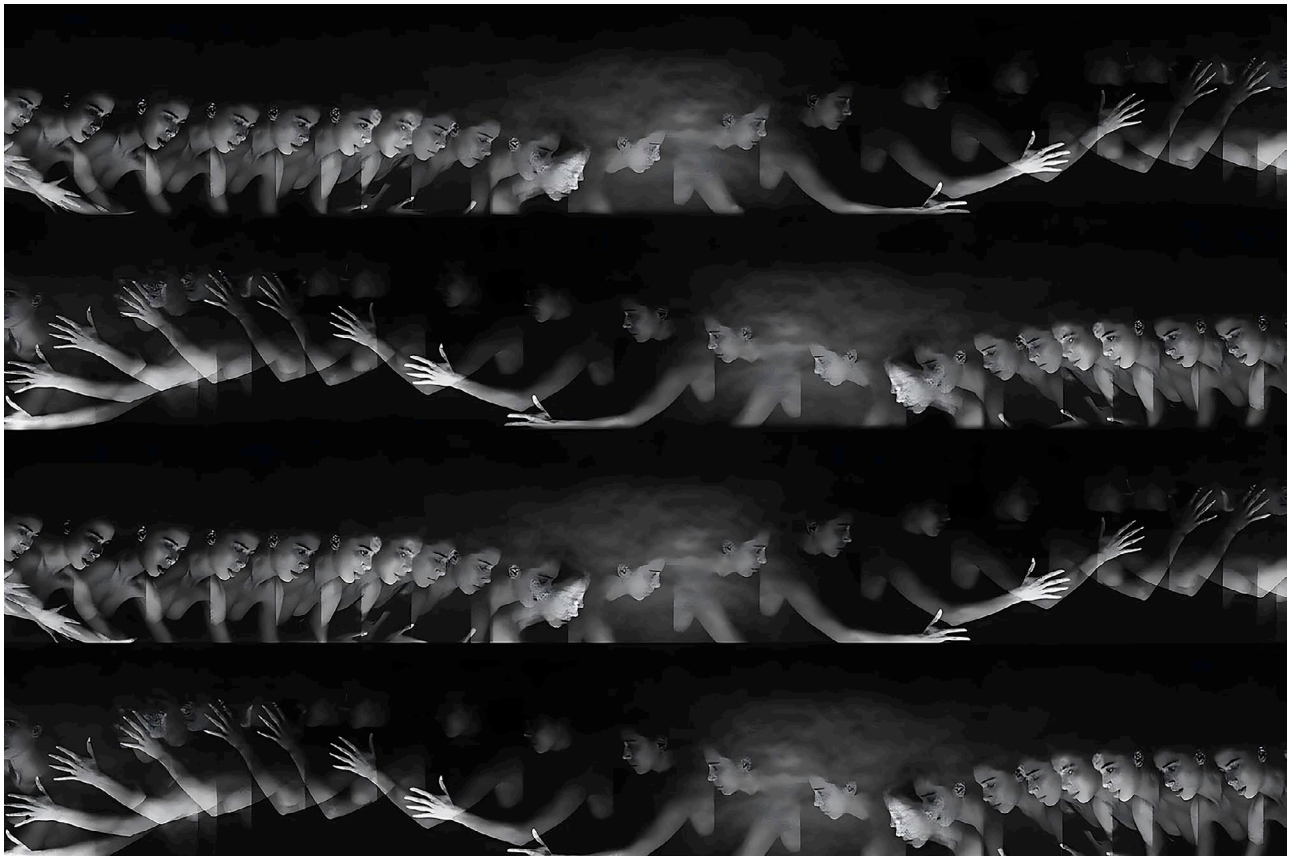
My  photographs not only explore motion and the passage of time, but the strobe stops the motion and reveals phantom images/shapes that exist but cannot be seen with the naked eye – seeing the unseen. I love the mystery of the liminal spaces and the “filmstrip” that unfolds a sequential story.

**Winged Angel Multiple**
*Earning your wings is not always the goal.*



Simply put:  I love black-and-white photography and its ability to convey a mood. It is also a nod to the early locomotion practioners that photographed in black and white. In its simplicity, it is less distracting and allows the viewer to focus on the subject and the photographer's message. Shapes, patterns, all compositional elements stand out in black and white. Contrast between light and dark is more dramatic than if the images were shot in color. There is a sense of mystery at play and the viewer is transported into a different reality. I feel that this minimalist approach allows me to be more creative and the human figure is not just a nude body moving in space, but it transforms into a series of new shapes moving through space and time and begs the question of motion and reality.

**Faces and Hands Multiple**
*Waving hello and goodbye simultaneously.*



I did a lot of research in Rochester, NY, and I spent time with curator Will Stapp at the George Eastman House. He loved my work and said that I should print my photographs very large. I also did research at the Visual Studies Workshop and the highlight of my visit was to Rochester Institute of Technology to interview one of the most incredible motion photo  scientists, Professor Andrew Davidhazy. His sense of play and curiosity was on full display as he showed me things that he had invented including round negatives and motorized film carriers on his enlarger.

**Sheraz Mix Multiple**
*I don't "mix" with her anymore.*

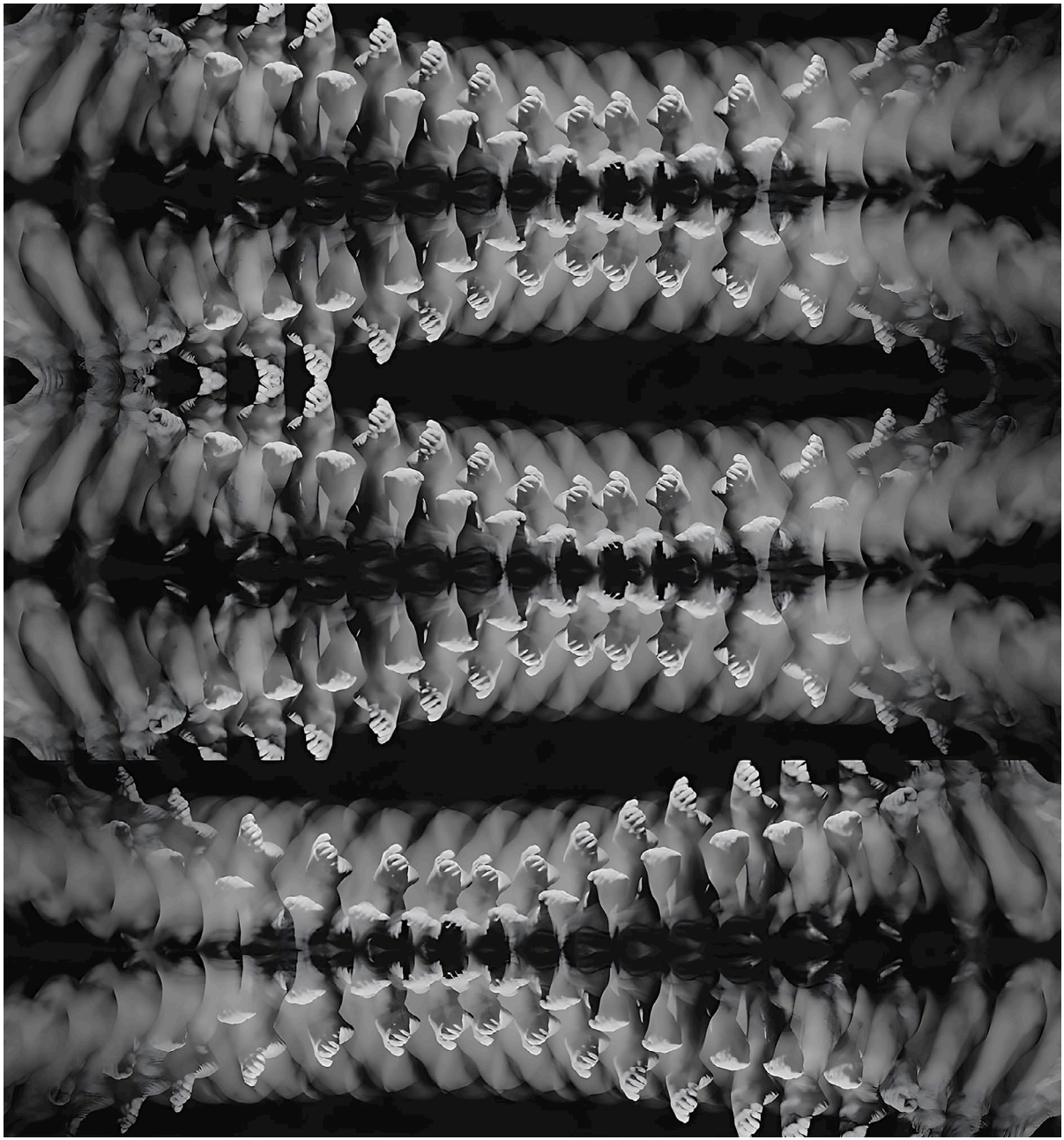
When I started working with motion photography, I used a bedroom in our house as a studio and blacked out the windows. I set up a black backdrop on stands and then had my stroboscope with the foot pedal and my film camera (sometimes 35mm, sometimes medium format) on a tripod in the completely darkened room. Then came the hard part: I only have two hands, so I needed to do a balancing act and became an "octopus." While I directed the model to move in certain ways, my foot was on the pedal to control the speed of the flashing stroboscope. One hand was winding the film with an open shutter, sometimes clicking the shutter, sometimes changing the aperture. I usually reloaded the film into the camera a second time to get multiple exposures.

**Alone Multiple**

*A self-portrait. At first there was loneliness, replaced by the strength of being alone.*

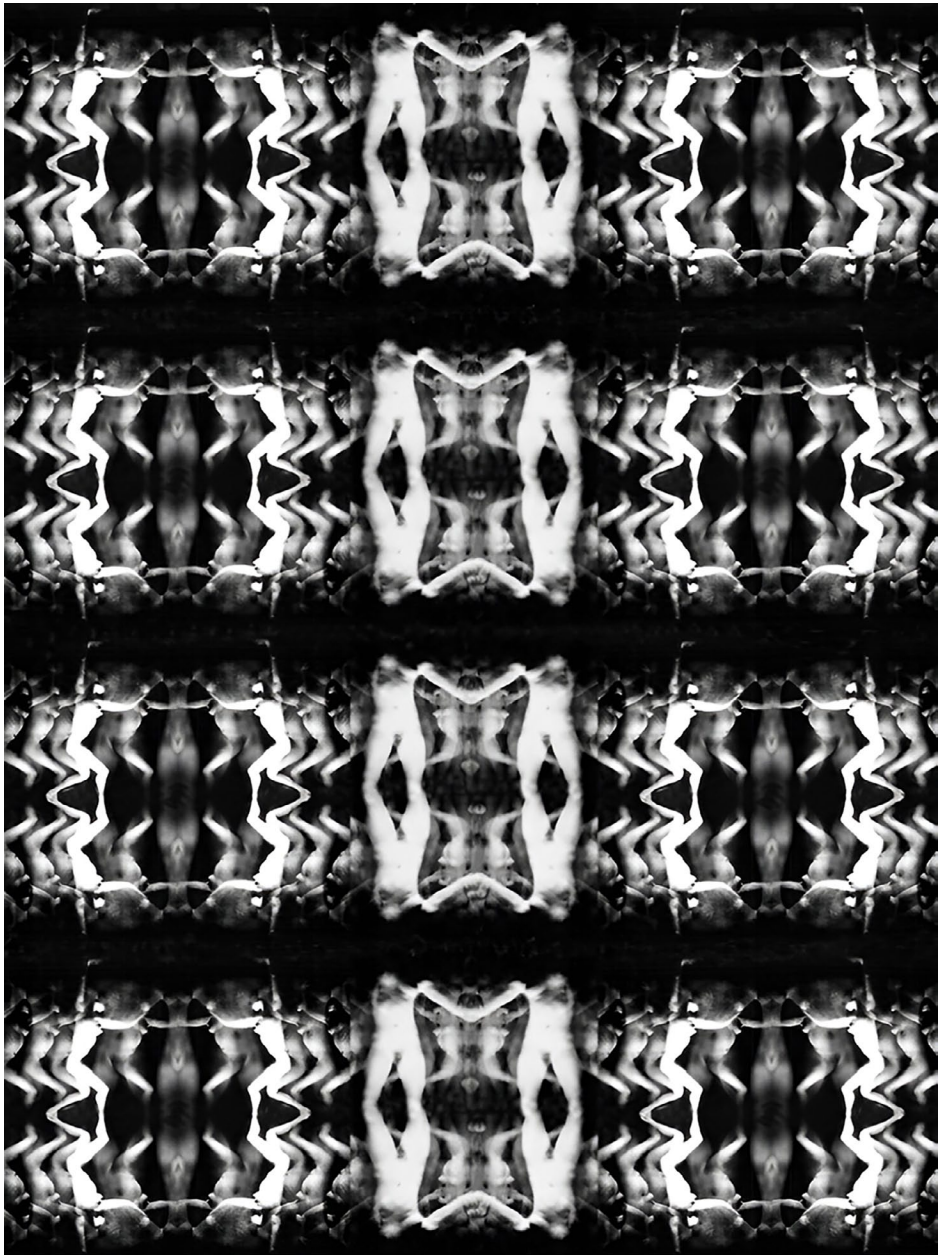
Then the film had to be processed, and I “broke the rules” of processing by sometimes developing 8-10 rolls at a time. Once the film was dry, I selected sections that I wanted to print, between 5” and 10” strips (5” for a 4” x 5” enlarger, 10” for an 8” x 10” enlarger). Printing was a bear. Lots of multiple exposures created a lot of high key/hot areas, so burning and dodging was a big part of the printing process. Needless to say my arms got a good workout. A benefit of printing digitally is that they can be printed much larger, and the fine details are much more visible.

**Feet First Multiple**
*Taking the first step leads to a wave of possibilities.*



I began working on the analog series of photographs in the 1990s and started with simple, sequential, panoramic images and then they became more complex with multiple exposures. Fast forward to present day and these same images are re-imagined and I digitally collage them with *Photoshop* and create new works of art in a rectangular format.

**Double Thrust Multiple**
*Do the Rorschach dance.*



I looked for models that could move and dance. After I shot my first images and printed them, word spread about what I was doing, so the recruiting process wasn't necessary. Models came to me and volunteered and I gave them photographs in return. The collaboration was simple. I choreographed the models, directing their movements, and we kept repeating the process for several hours. Then I would process the film, make contact sheets, see what worked, and then resume the process with the same model to further hone in on a visual idea. It was fun and challenging at the same time. The fun was in the process of working together and the challenge was mainly juggling all of my "octopus" functions in the dark.

**Jenae Mirror Multiple**
*Upon reflection, feeling exposed.*

There is a very precise method to do this type of motion photography, complete with mathematical equations so you can predict exactly what you will get. I did not do it that way because I preferred the spontaneity, overlaps and abstractions, and happy accidents of the process.

**Arms Up II Multiple**
*Warrior pose in abstract.*

After many "happy accidents" I have developed my own version of Time/Motion studies, using the nude figure as a subject as well as a foil. Through the use of multiple imagery, the photographs reveal images that display surreal, dreamlike themes and moods, explore time, and produce, on a flat surface, multi-dimensional creations in time and space. There are virtually limitless visual possibilities inherent in these techniques. I am always experimenting with different ways of making art, and feel like I'm an artist in search of a medium that hasn't been invented yet.

Maybe I will invent it?

**Stretch Multiple**
*Stretching the boundaries is what it's all about.*

# Artist Interview - Amy Heller

**You started out in the Washington, D.C., area but now live on Cape Cod. When did you "wash ashore?"**

I've been spending every summer in Provincetown since I was born (my parents honeymooned there and I consider it my second ancestral home), and my husband and I moved to Provincetown year-round in 2003 and then to Orleans year-round in 2012. We love it here and don't miss living in the city.

Amy Heller

**What kind of a place is the Cape for you as an artist? As a resident? Do you flee for a break in January or are you hard-core?**

It is an artist's haven, known especially for the famous "Cape Light" in the fall. Provincetown is the oldest continuous art colony in America. Being surrounded by water, the smell of salt air, the sounds of the seashore, I can't imagine living anywhere else. We do not flee in January. I do swim 3 times a week at my friend's indoor pool, take lots of nature walks, and I am always visiting galleries and museums on the Cape and in the Boston and Providence

areas. We take a few trips to New York City during the year, but there's no place like home!

**Where does the timeline begin? An academic and artsy family, yes?**

I was born at George Washington University Hospital, the youngest of three children and grew up in Silver Spring, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C. When I was 3 years old, we lived in Cambridge, MA, on the Radcliffe College campus during my father's sabbatical year at Boston College. At 3, I took a painting class and was always drawing and creating as a child. We often visited art museums and science museums in Washington, and our house was filled with art, antiques, beachcombing treasures from our Provincetown summers, and two grand pianos. My mother was a concert pianist, theatre producer, and author of several books.

I went to Woodlin Elementary School, then Montgomery Hills Jr. High School, then Montgomery Blair High School, all in Silver Spring. I dated my future husband, who is a musician, in high school. We met in the school library and we found out later on that we were born in the same hospital and went to the same nursery school. We reconnected just before I was graduating from Hampshire College, in Amherst, Massachusetts, and the rest is history. I took a post-undergraduate photography class and fell in love with the medium and immediately enrolled in the 60 credit M.F.A. Photography program at George Washington University.

**Any pivotal moments, formative surprises back then?**

Pivotal moment: Everything happened to me when I was five. So many "origin" stories for me began at the age of five — making art, dancing, reading, writing poetry.

Other pivotal moments: Going to innovative, experimental Hampshire College was eye-opening for so many reasons – having freedom to become who you were meant to be, moving in with my future husband, working for the Smithsonian and the National Gallery of Art as an exhibit specialist, discovering photography as my art.

Five-year-old Amy and friend; hand-made boat, Provincetown

**Do you remember the first decent photo you made? You didn't start photography at five. Or did you?**

I took polaroid photos when I was a child. I took some photography classes at Hampshire and hated it. One of my assignments was to photograph stray dogs on campus and they were pretty wild and I was terrified; so picture-taking was not something that I enjoyed at the time.

It really started with the post-undergrad photo course at Montgomery College. I became fast friends with my professor, Mary Staley, and after two years of graduate school, she asked me to teach for her while she was on sabbatical leave. My first decent photograph was of a nautilus shell that I sepia toned. I won several awards for that image, and a few gallery

owners in D.C. took notice. Then I started making Time/Motion Studies and one of my first ones, “Ode to Muybridge” really started everything.

**Motion study is difficult, highly technical photography. You are extraordinarily good at it. Talk about your training?**

I learned some technique in undergraduate, then in graduate school and by working for several photographers in commercial studios. Although I learned the Zone System and all kinds of other technical skills, I quickly put them aside. Photography felt a bit joyless with so many "rules" to live by (Hampshire College rebel). Also, I learned analog, not digital photography, and I still battle with technology, and yet at the same time embrace it.

Training in other media/crafts can help. I think your eyes are the most important tools: reading, looking at art, going to galleries and museums, connecting with other artists, and taking walks in nature. Creativity needs to be fed and nurtured, at least this is what is key for me. Full disclosure: I don’t call myself a photographer, per se, and I make photos more than I take photos. I have been called a fine art photographer, but I consider myself a lens-based artist working in mixed media, etc.

**Where do good ideas come from? How do you get from good idea to a result that works?**

Ideas come from absolutely everywhere and at any time. I don’t drink alcohol, take drugs, or drink coffee (love to sniff it), but I do love dessert. My brain/my imagination is my drug of choice, and lots of ideas come to light with waking dreams, stream of consciousness, etc. My method is organized chaos. Lots

of ideas written on little post-it notes, and mainly an overactive brain that can keep me up at night. How do I get from idea to finished artwork? I get in the Zone and start "playing." My imagination takes me on a journey that always has a surprise ending. I am constantly "dreaming of the world upside down."

**You, and other experimenters, have talked about happy accidents. Do you have a "for instance?"**

One day, fairly early in my work with moving film stroboscopy, my camera jammed and I thought I had broken it. But something made me go ahead and process the film anyway. The results were incredible with all kinds of abstract multiple exposures. From that moment on, I tried to duplicate these results and I kept trying new things. Stretching the boundaries is what it's all about for me and all of this was analog photography and printing in the darkroom in the 1990s.

**Do you still shoot film? Is there a wet darkroom in your life?**

Sadly, don't have a wet darkroom anymore. When we moved to the Cape, there was no room for one, so I donated it to an arts center. After I had donated everything, my husband and I went out to lunch and I was shaking. He asked if I was alright and then I said that I was. If one person creates something with this equipment, then it is totally worth it. I know that it went to the right place. I have not shot film in a while, but when I want a dose of "darkroom magic" (seeing the latent image appear), I make cyanotypes.

**Yes, alt-processes. Very different in both technique and concept.**

I work in multiple mediums simultaneously. When I make cyanotypes I like working on non-traditional surfaces such as

fabric: collaged cyanotype on fabric sculptures on revolving or motorized bases, collaged cyanotype on fabric egg sculptures, and LED mixed media cyanotypes on silk. My work started out analog, then digital, and with cyanotypes and my new Time/Motion Study Multiples, definitely both. I love mixing 19th-century technology with 21st-century technology, spanning three centuries of technology!

Stuck I

Like Mother, Like Daughter

**Dek Unu has published a lot of female artists. Do you consider your work "feminist?" Politically connected?**

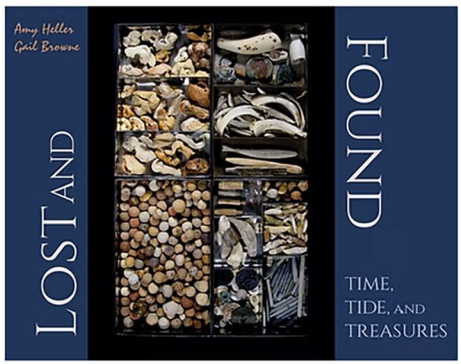
At Hampshire College I was the Co-Coordinator of the Women's Center. Feminism for me is multi-faceted and I consider myself too complex a being to be defined by one word. My artwork includes a lot of female imagery and is a feminist/female/self-portrait. Ask me in the future and my answer might be totally different.

Climate change is something that is seen and felt firsthand on Cape Cod. It is always on my mind on this fragile spit of land and my LED mixed-media cyanotype series, *Sea/Me*, expresses concern for the environment using sea life subject

matter: squid, octopi, skates. jellyfish, seaweed, algae, to bring otherwise hidden sea creatures to light. It is also a nod to the pioneering photographs of Anna Atkins and is inspired by fond childhood memories of beachcombing and swimming with my mother in Provincetown.

**You're also a published author. What's the story behind *Lost and Found: Time, Tide, and Treasures*?**

My good friend, Provincetown artist/gallerist Gail Browne's collection of pottery shards and beachcombing objects inspired a flood of memories taking me back to childhood beachcombing adventures with my mother. I suggested we do




At Amazon: ISBN-13 978-0764359422

a book. It took many years but, eventually, Gail and I, along with four additional artists/beachcombers, sent our material (including 500 of my photos) to an assortment of publishing houses. We were enthusiastically accepted by Schiffer Publishing and they gave us the freedom to design the book and give it the look and feel that it has. We had a gallery show at the Cape Cod Museum of Art and a talk, too, in the middle of Covid!

High point: finishing the book and seeing the first hard copy. Low point: the slog of putting it together. When I did my M.F.A.

thesis on the history of human locomotion photography, it was painful because I don't like to write. I swore I would never do anything like that again. And then I did the book with Gail. But it is beautiful and a true love letter to old Provincetown and an homage to my mother, who wrote several books. I am very proud of this accomplishment.

**Most of us have had day jobs, in or outside the arts, to inform and fund our "art problem." What about you?**

Day jobs have been mostly in the arts. I mentioned I was an exhibit specialist at the Smithsonian Museums, the National Gallery of Art, and the Library of Congress. In addition to my work at U.S. News & World Report, I worked as a photo researcher, editor, and curator for a number of companies including: Washington Post, National Geographic, Discovery Channel, Newseum, and Microsoft. When I moved to Cape Cod, I inventoried municipal art collections, worked in galleries, and was an administrator for the Historical Society of Old Yarmouth for seven years until spring 2020.

**What about influences? Is there anyone whose contribution needs a call out?**

One of my first inspirations was the Abstract Expressionist artist Peter Busa (friend/colleague of Willem de Kooning). When I was five years old he told me that I was going to be an artist. My parents first met him and his wife in Provincetown when my parents were on their honeymoon. He was a lifelong friend of the family. He loved me. He used to chase me around, showed me how to catch squid, etc. One day he saw a pencil drawing that I had made of a bride for her wedding. He didn't even ask if he could have it. He just took it because he loved it so much. I was quite peeved, but he said you can have ANYTHING in my studio. I had to wait until my family returned

to Provincetown the following summer and I wanted a large painting. My father made me take the smallest one there because he was afraid of transporting something so large back to Washington, D.C. I still have this painting and it is simple and beautiful. But I definitely have a love/hate relationship with it. I would love to see my bride drawing again.

**Teachers, formal and informal, often need a shout. Who stands out for you?**

My late brother, Daniel, was a wonderful photographer and was one of the only people I know who could take a good photograph of me. When I first started taking photography seriously, he would hold my hand through the technical instruction manuals and then I would take flight.

My former professor and friend Mary Staley taught me most everything from the beginning of my photographic journey. Her enthusiasm was contagious and she was/is a marvelous artist/photographer in her own right. She was the one who led the way. In grad school, my teacher Ray Metzger's composite/filmstrip photos had a profound influence on me and his critiques were perceptive and encouraging.

But my guiding light was really my husband. My artwork tapped into and complemented his musical background, so his commentary is and always has been insightful and helpful. He also takes good photos of me that I have used with shows and publications of my work.

**You've also been a teacher and mentor. What did you like about that role? Anything not so likeable?**

When I taught at Montgomery College in Takoma Park, Maryland, I loved seeing the progress students would make,

the confidence-building. And then, some of my proudest moments were seeing my students making a difference as photojournalists, teachers, art therapists, etc. On the down side, I've juried competitions, fellowships, grants, etc. It is not an easy task because sometimes there are so many good choices and not everyone can be selected. I've received rejections, too, so I can totally empathize.

Installation view, "Out of the Blue"
Provincetown Art Association and Museum

**What do you look for in new work you encounter? Is there something you particularly like? Something you try to avoid?**

I look for several things: Does it warrant a second look? Does it make me think? Stand the test of time? My standards are high. I don't like much and am a tough sell. Of course I like photographs with motion. I avoid sensationalized photographs.

**Equipment. Some say, "You don't ask a surgeon to work with a butterknife." Do you have any indispensable tools?**

I am a minimalist and have used Pentax and Nikon film cameras. For a quick second, I had a Mamiya medium-format

camera. I have made pinhole cameras. I have an old Speed Graphic press camera. I use my iPhone camera. I have a Canon Digital SLR. My lights are simple spots. I diffuse them with Translum material. I use small flashlights. I use natural light. I use *Photoshop* minimally. It's definitely not about the gear. It's your eye/how you see things. I know many people who have all of the "right" equipment, but they are lacking in vision.

**Generative AI is a hot button issue. Does it (will it) find a place in your practice?**

Not sure yet. I never say never, because when I do say never I do the exact opposite! I don't consider AI as photography. I think of it as its own medium. That could change for me, though.

**How do social media play into your work? Useful? Necessary but annoying? Worthless?**

I see social media as a necessity to communicate about my artwork and I belong to several alternative photography groups and art communities online. I use the Internet for research and to look at art. But then there's the rabbit hole that can take over, so one must be careful to interact with the real world, not the screen in front of you. No conversations, no politics. Just art. I am old-fashioned and still actually call my friends on the phone.

**What's in the future? Travel? A new project? Another book?**

I am honored to have my artwork in the collection of several museums and private collections and I continue to explore new places to exhibit my work. I'm really in the creating stage of it all. It's fun to have an exhibition and a lot of hard work. I feel that my favorite place to be is where I am at this very moment: dreaming and creating. An exhibition/publication is icing on the cake, but is not the be all, end all for me. Process over product.

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